



WHEN CARING FOR AGING PARENTS: TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!

As advances in medicine increase the life expectancy of Americans, more of us are faced with the joys and challenges of caring for an elderly parent. In fact, more than one third of baby boomers who have one or more living parent are providing some type of support for their parents now, and those numbers are rising.¹

Caring for elderly parents can be a mixed blessing. You may forge deeper bonds with your parents – hearing amazing stories about their younger days or family history – and develop a rich friendship that's different than the parent-child relationship you had in the past. But the added responsibilities of caring for a parent can cause emotional, physical and financial strain.

So what's the best way to reap the benefits of this time with your parents? First and foremost – and caretakers often forget this – take care of yourself.

KEEP YOURSELF HEALTHY

The extra duties you assume as a caretaker can be extremely stressful, and chronic stress has detrimental effects on everything from heart health to weight maintenance. Do all you can to reduce stress or, better still, to prevent it. For example:

- » **Get out and exercise.** Exercise helps boost self-esteem, gives you a healthy way to work out anxiety and dispel anger and leads to better sleep habits. Be sure to schedule time for exercise; otherwise you'll probably find yourself putting it off until "tomorrow."
- » **Eat a healthy diet.** Make sure you're eating nutritious meals – and don't skip breakfast. Avoid artificial "pick-me-ups" like caffeine and high-sugar snacks, which can cause your energy level to crash later in the day and can disturb your sleep.
- » **Create and maintain a support system.** Everyone needs a shoulder to lean on now and then. Your support system should include people who make you laugh, people to whom you can vent and people who can step in and help in an emergency. Someone close to you may be able to fill all those roles from time to time, but having a variety of family members or friends you can turn to can do wonders for your wellbeing. If you have siblings, let them know you'll expect their help. You can also find support groups and other resources through your EAP and online.

SET LIMITS

No one is perfect, and there's no way you'll be able to handle every little detail that comes up while tending to other relationships and responsibilities and maintaining a lifestyle that keeps you happy and healthy. To avoid caretaker burnout and resentment, try these tips:

- » **Schedule some "me" time:** You don't have to be on call all the time. Make sure you set boundaries and stick to them.
- » **Adult daycare:** If you work outside the home, adult daycare may be just what you need to keep your parents living at home (rather than at a 24-hour care facility). If you're a stay-at-home caretaker, adult daycare can ensure that you get a break during the day.

¹ USA Today. USA TODAY/ABC News elderly care poll.

http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/health/2007-06-24-elderly-care-poll_N.htm (accessed December 13, 2007).

- » **Community resources:** Check local agencies to see what respite services, support groups and senior activities are offered.
- » **Family:** If you have siblings, make sure they bear some of the responsibility, whether it be helping with day-to-day needs, providing money or making necessary calls to doctors.

Although you will face challenges taking responsibility for another adult, caring for your parents as they age can prove to be one of the most fulfilling parts of your life. Just remember that the arrangement hinges on you being able to provide for them, so keep your health up, do your homework to prepare for the future and find help when you need it. By taking care of yourself, you can better enjoy the evolving relationship with your parents in the autumn of their lives.

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for financial, medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral healthcare advice, nor as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.

Need help with eldercare issues? Call your EAP!

Meeting the needs of older adults can be time-consuming and exhausting. Your Employee Assistance Program can help you:

- » Assess your eldercare needs
- » Understand the variety of private and public services available
- » Evaluate the quality of eldercare settings and providers
- » Monitor and continually assess the care of your loved one

Call any time for a telephonic consultation.

For more information, call
(866) EAP-4SOC
(866) 327-4762

TDD callers, please dial (800) 327-0801

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